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**THE TURKISH MIDDLE EAST ROLE:
BETWEEN THE ARABS AND ISRAEL**

BY

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THE TURKISH MIDDLE EAST ROLE: BETWEEN THE ARABS AND ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT

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For centuries the Turks of Anatolia and the Arabs of the Middle East were joined together within the same state. But after the devastation of World War I, the Ottoman Empire lay in ruins (Sevres Treaty) and dismembered. Still today there is little understanding between the two people.

This study reveals how Turkey's Kemalist policy could overcome World War I outcomes, and follow a secular westernized foreign policy in the Middle East. From a reluctant role during the second half of the 20 th century , Turkey has moved to a more active role , as a NATO member, and an Islamic state with an important location between Europe , Asia and the Middle East.

Domestic policy and regional problems dictated Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey's internal and external security imply seeking natural allies in the Middle East. The past is still unforgettable for both sides and still affects their relations. On the other hand , their differences cannot be seen as obstacles for mutual cooperation in solving the different regional problems.

However, Turkey's option in the future Middle East cannot be determined by itself alone. Developments in the region and the world will affect its inclinations and decisions.

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THE TURKISH MIDDLE EAST ROLE: BETWEEN ARABS AND ISRAEL

Although any Middle East specialist will acknowledge Turkey's significant role in the history of the region, and distinctive relationship with the Arab states and Israel, Turkey is not often spoken of as an important factor in the peace process or in relations with its neighbors in the Persian Gulf.

Few countries occupy Turkey's exceptional position, literally at the crossroads between the cultures of East and West. Turkey overlaps Europe and Asia geographically, economically, politically, and even spiritually (as a Muslim country that aspires to be a part of the West). Its geographical situation has left it with something like an identity crisis, which continues to mark not only Turkey's national character, but also its place in the world.

At different times, Turkey has been said to belong, all at once, to the Near East, the Middle East, the Southern Flank, the Balkans, the Islamic world, the West generally, and Western Europe specifically. Central Asia since the fall of the Soviet Union might be added to these categories as well. In fact, Turkey does belong to each of these areas in some way.

To understand Turkish foreign policy, it is crucial to grasp the spirit of Turkey's republican foundation. In 1919 the Ottoman Empire lay in ruins after the devastation of World War I. The empire's dismemberment was made official by the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, which stipulated that all of the empire's European territories except Istanbul and eastern Thrace, all Arab lands, the eastern Anatolian provinces and other areas were to be cut away. Yet by 1923, in the wake of the startling victories by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) over the Greek expeditionary force in Anatolia, the allies were forced to acquiesce in the Treaty of Lausanne, which recognized the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

Once in power, Atatürk went on to define and shape the political life of the new republic, including its domestic and foreign policies. He ruled Turkey from 1923 until his death in 1938, devoting his life to setting up new governing institutions, and in molding the mind of his people to the commitments of the republic, both internally and externally. Atatürk's policy was directed away from the East and from other Turkic and Islamic peoples. He believed that the new Turkish Republic should be a modern, Westernized nation.

Though Turkey's relations with the countries of the Middle East have been shaped by its Western foreign policy orientation, they have also been colored by the Ottoman past. All of what is today referred to as the Middle East, with the exception of Iran, was once part of the Ottoman Empire. Despite cohabitation within a common state, however, the Turks and Arabs remained distinct groups separated by language, history, culture, and ethnicity, as well as by the

inescapable fact that the Ottoman Turks ruled and the Arabs were their subjects. The Arabs attempted to break away from Ottoman rule during World War I, an act that is nearly a century old, but still viewed as treachery by contemporary Turks. The memory of this common history is still very much alive in modern Turkey. Added to contemporary facts and problems, such as the transformation of the region affected by the Soviet collapse, it helps to stimulate interest on both sides and creates a framework for a significant change in relations.

TURKS AND ARABS: A SHARED HISTORY

1. BACKGROUND.

During the birth of the Islamic appeal around the "Higazzi" territories, the Turks were establishing an expanding state reaching to the Chinese east, and bordering on the Persian state in the south and the Byzantine Empire in the West. At the beginning, the Turks adopted the Buddhist religion, but they changed their cultural orientation several times, and finally a majority adopted Christianity. When Islamic armies began to conquer neighboring states, the Turks were concerned by the new Islamic movement. The results were hostilities and a decisive military confrontation, ending in an Islamic victory and the adoption of the Islamic faith by the defeated Turks. By this time, the Turks were being strongly influenced by Islamic letters, education, and culture. During the "Abassi" era the Khalife Al Moetasim commissioned many Turks to serve in his army, counting particularly on their administrative capabilities which allowed them to advance in Islamic institutions and come closer to the sources of power. Eventually they would be responsible for the assassination of many Khalefes. Finally, the Turks took over control and leadership within the Islamic state.

The Ottoman era allowed the Turks to expand and to conquer Byzantine Constantinople in 1453. Turks also defeated the Crusaders' campaigns against the Holy Places of Jerusalem. The Sultan Sleiman Al-Fateh (Sleiman the Lawgiver) made Istanbul the capital of a larger Islamic state which extended from the Holy Places to the Hijazzi, Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo.¹ The Turks' ambitions toward Europe and the Middle East allowed them to occupy many countries in these regions and to maintain their occupation over centuries, likewise creating a context for extended interaction between the Turks and their Arab and European subjects. Unfortunately the situation could not be prolonged indefinitely, as tendencies toward self-determination developed within the subject nations.

2. TURKISH-ARAB RELATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR ONE:

During the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire's weakness accelerated as a result of internal corruption, administrative incompetence, and movements toward self-determination by subject peoples. The Sultan's power over the territories of the empire gradually diminished. Finally, in 1912-13 as a result of the Balkan Wars, and in 1919 in the aftermath of the world war, the empire collapsed. The allies set out to dismember the former Ottoman domain, granting the Balkan states full independence. The Arab countries, after having sided with the allied powers during the war to escape from Turkish authority, were placed under British and French mandates.² This was considered by the Turks as a form of treachery, and would have a significant effect upon the future of Turkish-Arab relations. Finally, the force of the communist revolution also reached out toward the states of the Middle East. Nothing was left to the Turks except a small enclave around Istanbul. Only the national movement launched by Atatürk could save modern Turkey from dismemberment.

Generally speaking, both the Turkish and the Arab nations had great histories and played significant roles in building up Islamic structures and culture. Arabs were preeminent in defining Islam culturally, while the Turks spread Islamic culture over a wide geographical domain and encouraged interaction with other nations.³

3. TURKISH-ARAB RELATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR II.

The consequences of World War I were critical factors defining the future of Turkish-Arab relations. But World War II had an even more significant impact, as a result of the geopolitical implications of the rise of the U.S. and Soviet Union as global superpowers.

The decisive allied victory over the Axis forces in World War II changed the map of Europe and the Middle East significantly. The USSR demonstrated its determination to expand and to dominate Eastern Europe, and kept its eye on the Middle East. Its policies pushed in two directions: First, to dominate the oil reserves of the Gulf, and second, to ensure access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea through the Turkish Straits. With its critical geographical location, Turkey appeared to be a key to the Soviets' geopolitical goals. The U.S. clearly discerned the nature of Soviet strategy in Europe and the Middle East and moved quickly to interdict the threat by taking advantage of the Kemalist movement to bring Turkey closer to the West. In fact, the Soviet Union after the close of World War II appeared to represent a serious danger to Europe and the Middle East. This led the Truman administration to adopt policies designed to counter the threat of a Soviet invasion through Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. The Truman Doctrine, first articulated in 1947, provided Turkey with massive military assistance and pushed

Turkish membership in the NATO alliance, in order to close the door to any Soviet military incursion into the Middle East and protect the region's newly emerging nations from Soviet aggression.⁴

The Cold War had a major impact upon the Middle East, creating or exacerbating regional problems. It came on top of the still undigested legacy of the Ottoman era, the period of British and French mandates after World War I and its negative consequences, the creation of Israel after World War II, and the destructive Arab-Israeli confrontation. Regional interests also differed from one state to another, though some countries stepped forward to build close and mutually beneficial bilateral relations.

In addition to the Arab-Israeli problem, other issues had a significant impact on the region as a whole. These included the dispute between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria over water rights and the Kurdish problem, and the consequences of the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, the first Iraqi-Iranian War, the Cyprus problem, and the Turkish-Israeli military agreement which appeared to create a strategic alignment against the Arabs generally and Syria in particular. The Cold War made the attempt to address these issues in ways that could secure both regional and great power interests particularly difficult. During the cold war decades, instability and unclarity continued to dominate the situation in the Middle East.

TURKEY'S REGIONAL IMPORTANCE

Turkey's importance to the security of the Middle East is based first of all on the strength of its 600,000-man strong army, and the unity and democratic inclinations of its people. It is also based on geography.⁵ The Soviets' probable route of access to the Middle East followed the mountain passes of northern Turkey, Iraq, and Iran toward the Persian Gulf area. In order to follow this route, the Soviets would first have been required to neutralize Turkish forces by gaining control of Turkish air space and attacking airfields, military bases, transportation facilities, and supply depots. After Turkey's entry into NATO, however, the Soviets concluded that it would be too risky for them to expose a long line of communications starting at the Iranian border to Turkish military intervention.⁶ In addition, the U.S. and other NATO allies would become automatically involved in fulfillment of their alliance commitments.

During the Cold War, the Soviets also attempted to extend their authority into the Middle East by taking advantage of regional problems—the eight year Iran-Iraq conflict over access to the Persian Gulf, the forty years of Arab-Israeli hostility over Palestine, the disputed status of Jerusalem, rampant terrorism, the three million Arab refugees, the Suez canal crisis in 1956, and the occupied territories seized by Israel in 1967.

No indigenous Middle Eastern forces, without the help of Turkey, would have been in a position to deter or stop Soviet aggression during this period. Turkish forces would however have been formidable enough to delay any Soviet advances until NATO reinforcement could arrive. The Middle East has been protected since 1952 by Turkish forces ready to act in the event of any number of possible scenarios.⁷

Turkey's importance in the Middle East was considerable during the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, when its territories and military bases were opened to the U.S. and its allies. Finally, the Soviets realized that their objectives in the region were unrealizable and not worth the risk of a world war.

TURKEY AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

1. JEWS AND ARABS UNDER THE OTTOMAN REGIME.

To understand this aspect of the problem, we need to scan Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine during the Ottoman era, and then look at the establishment of Israel as a state.

Palestine was a part of the Ottoman regime. During the rule of Sultan Abd-ul-Hamid (1886-1908) the country was divided into regions and Sanjakas, with the Jerusalem Sanjaka placed directly under the supervision of the central government in Constantinople. Jerusalem had a special status due to the presence of holy places that attracted thousands of pilgrims and foreign tourists. The Sublime Porte selected competent senior officials as its government, but the Sultan gave the inhabitants of Palestine little feeling that an orderly administration was at work.⁸ Like millions of Arabs within the Ottoman Empire, the Arab population of Palestine lacked not only national and political autonomy, but also the most elementary cultural and national rights, such as Arab language schools and recognition of Arabic as an official language. Most of the Jews living in Palestine were still citizens of the countries from which they had come, and enjoyed the benefit of the "capitulations."⁹ The Jews enjoyed internal cultural autonomy and even a certain degree of municipal and communal autonomy. At its origin, the Jewish population of Palestine was predominantly urban. Half of the community was Sephardim, or oriental, and the other half Ashkenazi, or European.

2. JEWISH ADAPTATION TO THE LAND.

The first modern Jewish settlers, particularly those who turned to farming, found that the reality of Palestine included a difficult climate, poor, dry, and impoverished soil, and a lack of roads and communications. They had been under the impression that the land was empty and uninhabited. However, upon arrival they found that Arabs, some of whom were shrewd,

intelligent townsmen, controlled most of the country's commerce and trade. The majority of Arabs, however, were farmers with a low standard of living and primitive methods of cultivation, spread over the whole of the country.¹⁰

The new settlers reached Palestine on the crest of a wave of enthusiastic idealism that inspired them with a powerful longing to feel the physical presence of the land. They adapted to the climate, the soil, and the characteristics of the Ottoman regime. But contact with their Arab neighbors was hindered by differences in language and way of life. Many of the clashes between members of the two communities, particularly during the early years after Jewish colonies were established, took place because of the Jews' ignorance of the Arabs' language, culture, and manners.¹¹ During the first twenty years each wave of immigration gradually acquired an understanding of the Arabs' way of life, and in the course of time learned Arabic as well. This originally led to better relations with their neighbors. But without adequate security, Palestine's inhabitants suffered from criminal assaults. Ambushes and attacks on passers by, or the robbery of isolated houses, were everyday occurrences.

As the number of settlers in Palestine grew larger there were frequent grazing disputes between the Jewish colonists and their Arab neighbors, sometimes leading to attacks against recent settlers while at work in the fields, or to raids against whole settlements. The raiders sought to avoid heavy bloodshed, out of fear of involving their families and villages in a quarrel with the Ottoman government and the foreign consuls.¹² The Jewish settlers became more anxious to purchase Arab land at high prices, motivated primarily by an historical belief in the land as well as by considerations of economic advantage. The ultimate goal was self-dependence.

The Young Turks' constitutional program, and their economic and cultural policy, accorded the Jews a special role. Turkish tradition, and a legacy of assistance to the Jews over the centuries, as well as the status of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire under the *ancien régime*, reinforced this trend.¹³ More than half a million Jews lived inside the Ottoman Empire, and Ottoman leaders reiterated unofficial invitations to Jews to settle in their country. During the different stages of the Ottoman era, several attempts took place to assemble an Arab national movement and to secure close understanding and cooperation with the Jewish community. Unfortunately, these efforts did not achieve productive results.

3. THE BALFOUR DECLARATION: ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE.

World War I broke out in August 1914, and three months later the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of Germany. Jewish-Arab relations now entered an entirely new

phase, and by the time that the war had ended the entire political background of their relations had been transformed. The war also brought both sides severe trials and great hardships. The Arabs suffered no less than the Jews from the stringent military regime imposed by the Ottomans, who were anxious to suppress incipient nationalist ferment. Several Arabs who were accused of espionage were hanged.¹⁴ At the end of 1915 the Ottoman army launched an unsuccessful attack on the Suez Canal front, suffering heavy casualties.

As the outcome of the war remained in doubt, Jewish leaders strove to maintain neutrality. But the longer the war lasted and the clearer it became that the allies were destined to win, the more active the Jews became in defining their opposition to the Ottomans and to Germany.¹⁵ They attempted to obtain from the British and the allies what the Zionist leader Theodore Herzl and his followers had tried in vain to obtain from the Ottoman Sultan and the Young Turks: the right to free Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine. Their chief spokesman was Dr. Chaim Weizman (1877-1952). Weizman held that neutrality no longer served Jewish interests under the changed international circumstances, and urged that the Jewish community act through the "London-Baghdad Axis." With the help of several British cabinet ministers, Weizman's diplomacy helped to consolidate support for Israel in government circles and in British public opinion.¹⁶

After the outbreak of war, Arab leaders also responded to British and French propaganda, which endeavored to raise their national sentiments and stir up an Arab rebellion against their Turkish oppressors (and co-religionists).

Arab leaders were not aware of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 16 May 1916, which proposed a division of Syria, Palestine, and Iraq between England and France after the defeat of the Ottomans. Nor were they aware of the conflicting promises made by the British to the Arabs and the Jews. But the Arabs decided to stake everything on an allied victory, in the hope that British and French promises would be implemented after the war.¹⁷

On 2 November 1917, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, addressed the following declaration to Lord Rothschild, head of the Jewish community in Britain: "His Majesty's government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of the object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country. I should therefore be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist federation."¹⁸ It seems that the real background of the Balfour Declaration were behind the scenes negotiations motivated not so

much upon pangs of conscience over the Jewish people's bitter fate, but rather by the specific geopolitical interests of the British Empire.

In the debate over the reasons for Israel's establishment, some scholars and politicians believed that it was the British will and intent to see a state that would support Western policy in the region that was decisive. Others believed that the key factor was the strong will and hard effort of the Jewish community to establish a homeland, based on their historical and religious conviction that "God had named them as His chosen people," and that Palestine was their promised land.¹⁹

Whatever the explanation may be, Jewish people from all of the areas and countries of the Diaspora planned during the second half of the 19th century to settle in the Middle East. Their first missionaries, leaders, and statesmen used their skills and financial means to influence local authorities, obtaining privileges and immunities both during the Ottoman era and the British mandate period. The Jews took advantage of British political support, involved some of their troops in the war effort with the allies during World War II, attracted waves of immigrants from the USSR and Western Europe, reinforced their military capacity, and ignored all regional and international attempts to find an acceptable solution to the Palestinian question. In 1947 the British decided to withdraw their mandate authority from Palestine, handing over key terrain and facilities to the Jewish community. Heavy fighting took place between the Arabs and the Jews, which came to a temporary conclusion with the Jewish community in control of large areas of Palestine. In 1950, based on the promise of British Foreign Secretary Balfour first made in 1917, the Jewish people declared the state of Israel into existence. The new state was recognized by a sufficient number of members of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, and its sovereignty thereby confirmed.

TURKEY'S NATIONAL CONCERNS

Events in the Middle East, commitments toward the Western allies as a NATO member, and Turkish national interests have led Turkey through extreme pendulum shifts as concerns Middle Eastern policy. As a result of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, it has close links to Israel, which have been strengthened by the NATO affiliation. Modern Turkey has also been viewed with suspicion in much of the Arab world. For its part, Ankara has tried to distance itself from the Middle East, by defining its interests in a very narrow perspective.²⁰

In November 1947, when the UN General Assembly met to vote on the partition plan for Palestine, Turkey opposed the resolution. In a stand that was consistent with its prewar approach to the Arab territories, it voted against both the USSR and the U.S. It also initially

refused to recognize the state of Israel. Turkey's foreign policy during this period was largely dominated by its concerns about the Soviet Union and the threat of Soviet aggression.²¹ It was not long, however, before factors external to the region became primary in determining Turkey's policy: from 1947-1964, Turkey's alignment with the West would decisively affect its regional priorities—in particular, the urgent need to court the U.S. in the run up to the creation of NATO. Turkey was persuaded to recognize Israel, and it formalized relations in Tel Aviv in 1950, followed by an exchange of ambassadors in 1952.²²

During the first half of the 1950s, Turkey began to place greater importance on its emerging relationship with Israel. This was partly because Israel gradually demonstrated its commitment to combating international communism. Ankara also hoped to improve cooperative but cool relations with the U.S. by appealing to the American Jewish community. This developing relationship with Israel involved costs in Turkey's relations with the Arab states. In the summer of 1951, for example, Turkey sided with the West in protesting against Egypt's decision to prevent the passage of ships through the Suez Canal.²³ This was a blow to Turkish-Egyptian relations and it drew bitter criticism in Egypt. Also, in June 1954 the Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, during a visit to Washington, chided the Arabs by saying that it was time they recognized Israel's right to survive.²⁴

Despite these tensions, from the beginning of the decade the Turkish government sought to develop a security framework that would include the Arab states. This motivated Turkey to join the Baghdad Pact in 1955. Another sign of this effort came in 1956, when Ankara denounced Israel as the greatest threat to peace and order in the Middle East after its advance into the Sinai in cooperation with Britain and France. Israel's military action was opposed by the U.S., which required Israel and its Western partners to withdraw and relinquish their gains.²⁵ In fact, during the entire Suez crisis, Turkish policy followed, in spirit if not always in letter, the lead of the U.S. Ankara's stance encouraged Arab opinion to believe that Turkey had realized its earlier mistake in recognizing Israel, and might be prevailed upon to withdraw recognition. As events were soon to prove, this was a serious misperception.

A major setback to Ankara's search for pro-Western Arab allies came on 14 July 1958 when General 'Abed al-Karin Kassim's military coup toppled the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq. The Turks were willing to intervene militarily to install a pro-Western government, but the U.S. dissuaded them. Tensions between Ankara and Baghdad soon abated, but Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact. Despite Turkey's fears, Iraq did not move closer to the Marxist camp.²⁶

The early 1960s saw the emergence of a Turkish Middle Eastern policy capable of maximizing benefits from relations with both sides in the Arab-Israeli dispute without alienating

either. Unfortunately, at times unexpected developments disrupt the best-planned goals. During the Cyprus crisis of 1964, the limits of Turkey's friendship with the Arab world and the U.S. were cruelly exposed. It became clear that Turkey's rigid loyalty to the Western camp did not provide guarantees for securing national interests.²⁷ Ankara subsequently sought to improve relations with its former foes, including the Soviet Union and the nationalist Arab states. Improved relations with the USSR took the form of closer economic ties, with Moscow agreeing to build a number of industrial plants in Turkey, including a steel mill, an aluminum smelter, and an oil refinery. By the end of the 1960s, Turkey had become the recipient of more Soviet economic assistance per annum than any other country.²⁸

SUPPORTING THE PALESTINIANS

Turkey's most successful approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict came in 1967, during the run up to the Six-Day War. These events illustrated a more independent, flexible, and dynamic approach to the conduct of Turkish foreign policy.²⁹ Ankara explicitly told Washington that NATO bases in Turkey could not be used to supply Israel. The same position was adopted during the war of 1973. Turkey also displayed some sensitivity to the Egyptian position and refused to join the maritime powers demanding the reopening of the Gulf of Akaba to Israeli shipping. Following the war, Turkey voted for UN Resolution number 242, which required the withdrawal of Israeli forces from territory occupied during the 1967 war, but asserted the right of regional states to live with secure and recognized boundaries. Turkey's stance in 1967 was diplomacy at its best, and enabled Ankara to express sympathy for the Arab states without offending Israel.³⁰ Moreover, Turkey routinely supported Arab resolutions at the UN General Assembly, including the November 1975 resolution calling Zionism a form of racism. Turkey was also increasingly willing to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the exclusive representative of the Palestinian people, and the PLO was permitted to open an office in Ankara in 1975. Nine months later Ankara vigorously protested against the Israeli annexation of occupied Jerusalem, withdrawing its *chargé d'affaires* in Tel Aviv and leaving official representation at the second secretary level.³¹

The impetus for the clear pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian tilt was concern for the use of the oil weapon by the Middle Eastern members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).³² Ankara felt that there was too much at stake economically to risk adopting even a cautiously neutral stance.

In the early 1980s, Turkey reverted to a more balanced relationship between Arabs and Israel. An important influence was the bilateral peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel,

resulting in Egypt recognizing Israel in 1979 in exchange for the surrender of the Sinai, and including a visit of PLO leader Yasser Arafat to Cairo in 1983.³³ Other influences also encouraged Turkey to reconsider its Middle Eastern priorities. First, there was the failure of the Arab countries and the PLO to support Turkey's Cyprus policy. Neither at the UN nor within OPEC had the Arab world recognized the Turkish Cypriotes demand for a separate national identity or the need for a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus dispute to take into account the Turkish community's right to self determination. Indeed, many Arab states, as well as the PLO, enjoyed cordial relations with the Greek Cypriots and recognized the Greek Cypriot government as the sole legitimate administration on the island.³⁴

RAPPROCHEMENT WITH ISRAEL

The extreme swing of the pendulum again proved to be short-lived. Relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv had grown closer once more by the mid-1980s. Intelligence cooperation began to flourish concerning the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).³⁵ Such cooperation improved Turkey's image in the U.S. Also, the Iran-Iraq war, a conflict that came to affect the entire Gulf region, increased Turkey's importance and widened its range of options. Turkish-Israeli relations began to improve in the fall of 1986, when Turkey appointed Akram Güvendiren, a senior diplomat, as its *chargé d'affaires* in Tel-Aviv, a gesture that came in the wake of the deterioration of Turkish-Syrian relations following the initiation of the Southeast Anatolia Development Project and Syrian support for the PKK.³⁶ Turkey's diplomatic gesture toward Israel could not be sustained, however, because of the outbreak of the Intifada in the occupied territories. Ankara issued statements denouncing Israeli behavior as a violation of Palestinian human rights.³⁷

With the start of peace talks between Israel and the Arab countries at the Madrid Conference in 1991, Ankara considered its criteria for improving relations with Tel-Aviv to be satisfied. A number of other factors contributed to Ankara's reorientation, including the impact of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The coalition that fought Iraq was supported not only by Turkey and Israel, but by several Arab countries as well. The PLO, on the other hand, sided with Saddam Hussein, causing it to lose financial aid from the Gulf States and some of the international support it had acquired during the Intifada. This made it easier for Ankara to ignore the PLO and to improve relations with Israel.³⁸ Equally important was the fact that by 1991, Ankara was convinced that relations with Iraq and Syria were unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future given their irreconcilable positions on the water issue. Upgrading relations with Israel was seen as a way of making Turkey more secure against a future anti-Turkish

coalition of Arab states.³⁹ Finally, the economic factor that encouraged Turkish pro-Arab policies in the 1970s and 1980s had lost relevance with the oil price decline of the late 1980s, the shrinkage of the Middle East market in the aftermath of the Gulf War, and subsequent U.S. sanctions against Iraq. Furthermore, as a result of Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal's export-oriented economic reforms of the late 1980s, by 1992 more than two-thirds of Turkey's trade was with the industrialized OECD countries. Only 20 percent of Turkish trade went to Islamic countries, including such non-Arab states as Indonesia, Iran, and Pakistan. Hence, Ankara could more easily afford to disregard the possible negative consequences of moving closer to Israel.⁴⁰

The factors that led to a closer association with Israel in recent years will likely continue to weigh upon the relationship. Ongoing tensions with Syria and Iraq will be a major factor in preserving and intensifying Turkish-Israeli ties. Given the intensity of the water dispute, improved relations between Turkey and its southern neighbors seem unlikely.⁴¹

Since 1994, Turkish relations with Israel have reached the level of a strategic partnership, with a variety of agreements defining diverse forms of cooperation. Once again, Turkish policy makers have had to reconsider national interests as the stormy winds of the Middle East crisis continue to blow.

TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

Several factors account for a new Turkish activism throughout the region—growing self-confidence based upon economic potential and an improved and more experience military, and changed regional circumstances that have weakened Turkey's neighbors. Despite the increased attention that Turkey paid to the plight of the Palestinians, its relationship with Israel remained intact. Changed regional circumstances, and especially Egypt's example, were very useful to Turkey here. Ankara could invoke Cairo's rapprochement with Tel-Aviv as a precedent whenever other Arab states subjected Turkey to criticism for its friendship with Israel.⁴²

By the end of 1989 it was clear that the peace process was bogged down due to the procrastination of the Israeli government.⁴³ However, factors external to the region also had to be taken into account in Turkish policy making. The governments of Eastern Europe established full diplomatic relations with Israel. Subsequently Greece, which had always sought to conciliate the Arab states in order to prevent a Muslim consensus in support of Turkey over the Cyprus problem, upgraded its diplomatic links to full relations.⁴⁴ The moves by Bulgaria and Greece perplexed Ankara. The Turks felt that if two of their traditional rivals were moving to improve

their diplomatic standing, this could eventually work to Turkey's disadvantage. In late 1990, therefore, Turkey started to upgrade diplomatic relations with Israel to full ambassadorial status.

RECURRENT FACTORS IN TURKISH POLICY MAKING

Neither Turkey nor Israel is an Arab states, but both must exist in a region where Arab states are in a majority, and Arab politics are pervasive. Turkey as a geographically marginal state, and Israel as a politically marginalized state, are in a sense fated to regard one another with empathy. Similarly, they both emphasize their distance from the political milieu of the area by identifying with Europe.⁴⁵ Of course, cultural affinity or even political empathy is not the only factor that determines interstate relations. Although their common outlook on the region and a shared distrust of Arab politics has led to the current close association, this is only one phase in a long history of bilateral relations.⁴⁶ In the future, other factors could become more important in Turkish policy making.

At least four important structural factors that will contribute to shaping Turkish-Israeli relations may be mentioned. The first is the natural affinity between Turkish elites and Israel. This will pull Turkey in a pro-Israeli direction, but will be partly balanced by an emotional sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians.⁴⁷ The prevailing view nonetheless leans toward Israel, particularly among those with a more strategic perspective on international relations. The second is the assistance that Israel can provide for Turkey in areas where it enjoys a comparative advantage. Worthy of note here is the role of the Israeli lobby in the U.S., which Israel can mobilize on Turkey's behalf as well.⁴⁸ Experience with the Armenian issue has convinced senior figures in Turkey that the pro-Israel network in Washington can indeed deliver the desired results. Third is the existence of a Turkish Jewish community both within Turkey and within Israel. The Jews in Turkey, concentrated in Istanbul, probably number around 24,000, but they are disproportionately influential due to their wealth and prominent position in commercial life.⁴⁹ Turkey is likely to be increasingly protective of its Jewish community because of its influence over the U.S. Jewish lobby, and the continuing sensitivity surrounding the Jewish question in America and Europe. Finally, there is the growing potential for commercial links between Turkey and Israel. Trade ties expanded in the late 1980s. In 1988 bilateral trade amounted to about \$130 billion, half of the sum representing official trade with the remainder channeled through a host of front companies in Europe.⁵⁰ A pending free-trade agreement, from which both sides will benefit considerably, is vital in this regard.

TURKISH-ISRAELI MILITARY TIES

The Turkish-Israeli rapprochement has generated new alliances in the Middle East, though it is too early to assess their importance. Despite all the steps that have been taken, the Middle Eastern response to improved Turkish-Israeli relations features much verbosity but very little action. Counter-alliances have not emerged, and given the depth of existing differences it is doubtful that they ever will. This leaves opponents of the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement with much frustration but few options.⁵¹

Israel and Turkey are motivated by mutual interests. They find that their "Western" character and special relations with the West have led to close collaboration. However, military ties have been particularly important in Turkey's attempt to achieve balance in its relations with both Israel and the Arab states. From a Western perspective, these ties will increase Israel's domination in the eastern Mediterranean. Military agreement also contributes to U.S. efforts to contain the Iranian challenge, especially in the Gulf, but also in regard to Iranian ties with Syria and Lebanon and the Iraqi threat to the entire region. Israel-Turkish military cooperation touches upon many domains—air, sea, land (infantry and armor), intelligence, and the manufacture of military hardware including aircraft, armaments, and missiles. Military cooperation is close, institutionalized, and structured, involving steering committees, regular meetings, and an ongoing strategic dialogue. It includes a hierarchy of deliberations that reaches up to defense ministers and even higher. Cooperation involves financial exchanges in the hundreds of millions of dollars, if not more.⁵²

1. TRAINING:

A February 1996 agreement, concluded for a five year term subsequently to be extended annually, prepared the way for mutual military visits, training and exercises, dispatch of observers to oversee military exercises, staff exchanges, and the acquisition of military know-how. It also prepared for the two air forces and navies to conduct mutual visits and joint exercises. The agreement stresses that when the soldiers of either signatory are on the territory of the other, they will not become involved in conflicts between the host state and any other third party.⁵³ Details concerning air force training were also negotiated. The two navies were provided with a schedule of maritime exercises, including naval maneuvers in the summer of 1996 and *Operation Reliant Mermaid*, a naval rescue exercise held in January 1998 that included the participation of U.S. forces.

2. ARMAMENTS.

In August 1996, the ammunition industries in the two countries concluded an agreement.⁵⁴ The media reported Israeli-Turkish collaboration in the manufacture of Popeye surface-to-air missiles; the sale of Israeli Python 4 air to air missiles to Turkey; Turkish manufacture of the Galilee infantry rifle; the formation of defensive doctrines against ballistic missile attack; eventual Turkish participation in the production of Israel's Arrow anti-missile system; and joint manufacture of the jet-propelled 400 kilometer range Delilah cruise missile. It was reported that the Turks voiced great interest in intelligence and other data transmitted by the Ofek satellite Israel recently fired into space. An Israel firm has contracted to modernize 54 Turkish F-4 Phantoms and 48 F-5s, at a cost of some \$900 million and with the help of some creative financing. Turkish planes are to undergo structural improvements and be fitted with radar systems, computerized aeronautical systems, navigational systems, electronic warfare systems, and armaments to improve their performance in bombing missions.⁵⁵ The process is to be completed by 2006-2008. The offer to sell Israel's Merkava Mark-3 tank and to modernize Turkey's Patton (M-60A3) marks the two countries' growing interaction in relation to ground forces, including improvements in artillery capabilities both in range and in penetration power. Mutual trust generates mutual dependency, and works to create collaboration in the most sensitive and secretive domains.⁵⁶ Israel's position as the world's fifth arms producer fits with Turkish plans for arms procurement, modernization, and the refitting of what is Europe's largest and NATO's second largest army—Turkey has plans to spend a stunning \$150 billion for arms over the next twenty-five years. Both countries exchange facility services to each other in most military domains, in order to harden their military cooperation and ties.

3. INTELLIGENCE.

Intelligence cooperation, another principal area of Israeli-Turkish collaboration, comprises the exchange of information, routine briefings, analysis of data collected by Israeli satellites, and tripartite deliberations involving U.S. agencies. Turkey's location next to Syria, Iraq, and Iran (three states of special interest to Israel), plus Israel's border with Syria (a state of interest to Turkey) reinforces their mutual utility. The two governments watch for the development of weapons of mass destruction, for various forms of radicalization, for terrorist activity, for threats to energy sources, for development in the Turkish Republic, and for Iranian influence.⁵⁷

4. CIVILIAN COOPERATION.

To damp down criticism of Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, Turkish authorities stress that the military element is just one factor in a wider relationship. Israeli-Turkish trade has grown

steadily. Interaction has also developed in the areas of culture; education, and science; the environment; mail and telecommunications; efforts to stop the smuggling of drugs and narcotics; encouragement and protection of financial investments; avoidance of dual taxation; and technical and economic cooperation.⁵⁸ In light of such wide cooperation, Turks and Israelis are unlikely to let politicians disrupt relations between them.

ARAB AND ISLAMIC REACTIONS

Most Arabs dislike the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Arabs see the relationship as a renewed Baghdad Pact, regarding the two countries as subsidiaries of the West. Arabs believe that if Ankara is not curbed, additional Arab territory, such as Mossul, could fall into Turkish hands, just as Alexandretta did in the past.⁵⁹ The Turkish-Israeli rapprochement has thus heightened pre-existing Arab fears, and has been described as nothing less than the most perilous development in the Middle East since the First World War. The Israeli-Turkish rapprochement also seems to be generating new alliances in the area, though it is too early to assess their importance. Iran signed a series of trade agreements with Syria, and the two states have signaled an intention to improve relations further. Syrian-Iraqi relations have improved, despite Damascus' professed concern about being tarnished by association with a leper state like Iraq.⁶⁰ Iran's relations with Egypt, cold for nearly two decades, appear to be on the mend, though Cairo's apprehensions regarding Teheran's role behind Islamic terrorism in Egypt and North Africa remains an obstacle. Several military developments also need to be understood in the light of the Turkish-Israel relationship. When Russian and Syrian anti-aircraft units held joint exercises at a Russian experimental site in September 1997, Iran justified an expansion of its army by citing the need to defend itself against what it terms the Israeli-Turkish conspiracy. Despite these events, however, Arab reactions to the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement have been more rhetorical than substantial.

THE KURDISH PROBLEM

One of the most important Middle Eastern issues, and an inseparable part of Turkey's internal policy, is the Kurdish Question. The Kurdish areas of modern Turkey, especially in the southeast, have been chronically impoverished. Many Kurds have been ambivalent in their allegiance toward the Turkish state. For its part, Turkey did not succeed in narrowing the gap between the rural Kurdish areas and the rest of the country. This led to protests, mass demonstrations and eventually armed uprising, accompanied by Turkish army interventions in the Kurdish regions beginning in 1979. The most recent insurgency, led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) headed by Abdullah Öcalan, set the goal of an independent greater

Kurdistan comprising parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.⁶¹ The PKK began its campaign in 1984 with an operative strength estimated at 3500 fighters. Their main tactics were to proclaim armed struggle against Turkish "colonialism" and to launch hit and run engagements, mainly against soft targets, both human and material.⁶² The mountainous terrain makes it extremely difficult for the Turkish security forces to stop all incursions into the country. The beginnings of the 1990s witnessed an increase in the intensity of the conflict and greater loss of life, a result not only of increased activity by the PKK, but also a more concerted effort by the Turkish security forces to stamp out the incursions.⁶³

The Turkish state has attempted to deal with its Kurdish problem in three ways. First, it has encouraged the integration of its Kurdish population into the economic and political life of the country. Second, it has addressed the specific problem of Kurdish political violence. Third, it has sought to tackle the problem of economic underdevelopment in the Kurdish east and southeast through the GAP project.⁶⁴ The Turkish military has also become increasingly involved in the effort to impose security in the southeast. Indeed, under cover of the Gulf War a more hard line policy was introduced where collective punishment was widespread and many Kurdish villages were destroyed.⁶⁵ The arrest of Öcalan has led to a reduction of political violence, but Turkish military operations have not been able to solve the Turkish-Kurdish problem.

Iran has also played an important role in regard to the Kurdish problem. After the Iranian revolution, Turkish-Iranian relations entered a period of instability. As Turkey attempted to control the PKK guerrillas by pursuing them across the borders of neighboring states, the Iranians raised a series of protests. Turkey responded by accusing Iran of becoming the most active supporter of the PKK in the region. Iran has in turn accused Turkey of providing a safe haven for anti-Iranian Mujahadeen-el-Khalq forces across their common border.⁶⁶ Iran is also concerned that Turkey's incursions against the PKK in northern Iraq might extend its long-term control over the area.⁶⁷

Despite these tensions, Turkey and Iran seem to have concluded that they cannot go too far in escalating the situation in the region. They have reached a number of agreements to conduct simultaneous operations against both the PKK and the Mujahadeen-el-Khalq.⁶⁸ However, the Turkish military has not been convinced that a willingness to cooperate was truly meaningful, and has sought better ties with Israel over strong Iranian objections.

Among Turkey's three Middle Eastern neighbors, it has the best prospects for balanced relations with Iraq. This is indeed ironic, given Turkey's role in confronting Iraq during the Gulf War. Iraq is virtually landlocked, and even where it does have an outlet to the sea, supply lines

are long and vulnerable. For Iraq, Turkey is the most direct land bridge to Europe.⁶⁹ The potential for Iraqi-Turkish cooperation is further enhanced by the fact that they have a greater convergence of interests than do Turkey and Syria. In addition to trade, Baghdad and Ankara share a common approach to their respective Kurdish problems. Both feel threatened by Kurdish nationalism. This makes them disposed to cooperate, rather than using the problem as an instrument for exerting pressure against a neighbor.⁷⁰

Syrian-Turkish disagreements over major policy issues are substantial, but both sides also share some common objectives and seek to avoid ill-considered moves that might provoke confrontation. In the case of Syria, caution is strengthened by a preoccupation with Israel. Syria and Turkey have three interlocking areas of shared concern. The first is a commitment to maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. Neither side supports the creation of an independent Kurdish state.⁷¹ Such an initiative could also destabilize Syria's friend Iran, which has a Kurdish population of about five million. In addition, Syria opposes the fragmentation of any Arab state on ideological grounds. A second objective shared by Turkey and Syria is the containment of Saddam's ambitions. And a third common concern is the water question, where for two decades intermittent diplomatic discussions and technical negotiations have been underway.

Unfortunately, despite these shared concerns, Turkish-Syrian relations have been difficult since the second Gulf War. Turkey has refused to accept a compromise with Iraq and Syria concerning the water problem. Syria responded by playing the PKK card, harboring Öcalan and allowing PKK guerrillas to open training camps in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon controlled by Syria. Syria rejected the French decision to transfer the border province of Hattay to the Turks in 1939, and it has used its influence to block World Bank financing of the GAP project.⁷² In the fall of 1998 Turkey used military pressure against Syria to stop its support for the PKK, and to force Damascus to expel Öcalan and declare the PKK a terrorist organization.

Taking advantage of chronic instability in the Middle East, the unsolved Palestinian problem, the water dispute with Syria and Iraq, its military ties with Israel, and its close association with the West as a NATO member, Turkey has assumed a very assertive posture toward Syria. Damascus has responded by relying on Arab support, and Arab League efforts spearheaded by Egypt have helped to defuse tensions.

TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST WATER CRISIS

The Middle East water crisis adds another factor to the region's many problems. Some scholars believe that solving the water problem in the region will facilitate the resolution of other regional dilemmas, thus relaxing the tense situation that exists throughout the Middle East.⁷³

Unfortunately, at the dawn of the 21st century, interstate relations in the Middle East continue to be dominated by power politics. There are many reasons why this is so—the aspirations of would-be regional hegemony, ethnic and sectarian conflict, and the tendency to equate challenges to elite dominance with threats to national security. The combination of these factors makes the political environment in the Middle East conflict prone, where almost every problem, including water rights, is perceived as a zero-sum problem. Sooner rather than later, pressure within the region upon water resources will become so acute that wars may erupt as states seek to expand and secure their own supplies.⁷⁴ Tracing the origins and evolution of the water crisis between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria may help to locate obstacles to cooperation and identify practical solutions to help resolve what otherwise might become a steadily escalating dispute.

Given the conflict prone environment, states in the Middle East do not trust the intentions of real or potential rivals. Each state seeks to be self-sufficient. The problem lies in the fact that, unlike oil, river waters flow across national boundaries. Until World War I, the question of water rights did not appear in the long list of grievances between Turkey and Syria. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers flowed within territories that were under Ottoman control. However, the redrawing of the region's political map at the end of World War I created a more complicated situation. Syria and Iraq became co-sovereigns over the two rivers by the terms of the treaties negotiated between the mandatory powers—France and Britain acting on behalf of Syria and Iraq respectively—and Turkey. These negotiations culminated in a series of treaties, protocols and agreements.⁷⁵ The arrangements regulated the use of the Tigris and Euphrates and explicitly protected the rights of the downstream riparian states. The agreements functioned as long as the waters were used at a minimal level. Turkish interest in a wider exploitation of the waters of the Euphrates began in the 1950s, when Syria launched a development scheme on its segment of the river. In the 1970s, Turkey began the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) for domestic political reasons—the Turkish elite, responding to left-wing domestic criticism over the economic exclusion of the Kurdish population of southeastern Anatolia, set out to develop the region comprehensively.⁷⁶ The project was massive—GAP includes a total of twenty-two dams, nineteen hydroelectric plants, and seventeen irrigation schemes in thirteen distinct projects covering an area of 73,863 square miles. The cost was estimated at \$32 billion.

TURKISH CONSIDERATIONS AND TRILATERAL TALKS

The benefits to Turkey from the GAP, including greater domestic stability and economic advancement, seemed to outweigh the potential benefits of cooperation with Syria and Iraq. A bilateral or trilateral agreement would inevitably reduce Turkey's share of the water.⁷⁷ This was the kind of cost-benefit analysis that appears to have determined Turkish behavior. Progress on a binding agreement with Syria and Iraq has consistently been thwarted by Turkey to gain time for the completion of the GAP. Several rounds of talks took place between the concerned parties. The first Turkish-Syrian bilateral talks began in 1962 and were related to information sharing concerning the Euphrates basin.

The two sides met again in 1964 and agreed to form a Joint Technical Committee (JTC) whose task would be to define an "equitable and reasonable" distribution of Euphrates waters. It was also agreed to include Iraq in what would become a Tripartite Committee.⁷⁸ Some progress was made, but the outcome of the talks was never decisive.

Iraq and Syria consider the Euphrates to be an international river, to be treated as an integrated system. The Turkish position is that international rivers are only those that form the boundary between two or more riparian states. This interpretation means that Turkey is not constrained to recognize the co-sovereignty of the downstream riparian states. Its obligations toward Syria and Iraq consist only of unilateral guarantees promising them a certain amount of water.⁷⁹ The International Law Commission (ILC) of the United Nations, after many years of work, in September 1991 provisionally adopted a set of "Draft Articles on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses," defining an international watercourse as "a watercourse parts of which are situated in different states." The ILC does not distinguish in this regard between international and boundary rivers. The ILC definition clearly applies to the Tigris and Euphrates. Moreover, Turkey considers the two basins to be one integrated entity. Turkey's position reflects its self-interest, for if it were accepted less water would need to be released to the downstream riparian states.⁸⁰

Though Turkey's agreement to take part in several rounds of talks was promising, its opposition to a binding trilateral agreement remained unaltered. Tensions reached their peak in January 1990, when Turkish authorities began to fill the reservoir of the Atatürk Dam. At this time the river system was diverted for a full month. The calculation in Ankara was that Iraq, recovering from its war with Iran, was in no position to react forcefully. Similarly, it was assumed that Syria would be distracted by events in Lebanon, where part of its army was stationed, and unable to react. However, the damage was done. Large areas were damaged in Syria and Iraq due to lack of water, and farmers were not able to irrigate their crops.⁸¹

The GAP affected Syria and Iraq adversely, and caused special problems in Syria, where the Euphrates supplies up to 86 percent of available water resources. Furthermore, Syria's ability to generate its own hydroelectric power is curtailed by depleted water levels.

THE SYRIAN RESPONSE

Because of its dependency, Syria is eager for a binding agreement with Turkey that will secure its future water supplies. The situation has forced the Syrian government to adopt two strategies; first to reduce Syria's dependence on the waters of the Euphrates by increasing the efficiency of its water-resource management, and second to increase the costs of Turkish non-cooperation.⁸² Natural gas is being exploited as a substitute for hydroelectric power, and several contracts with Chinese companies have been signed to build power plants. The government seeks to improve irrigation methods by working with institutions like the United Nations Development Program.⁸³ These efforts have not been uniformly successful—they have resulted in soaring electricity costs, and cuts in water consumption of up to 40 percent. Syria has also sought to win leverage against Turkey by using carrot and stick tactics. Carrots have included opposition to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Syria has also opened its domestic market to Turkish exports, and Turkish contractors have won important projects in Syria.⁸⁴ The stick has consisted of blocking Western donor funding for the GAP by withholding consent (the World Bank's policy is to withhold financing for projects until disputes between riparian states are resolved), thus forcing Turkey to fall back on its own resources. These policies have been to some extent successful, and in 1987 Turkey signed a protocol guaranteeing Syria a flow of 500 cubic centimeters per second.⁸⁵

IS COOPERATION POSSIBLE?

Turkish insensitivity to Syrian needs and concerns is a product of traditionally difficult relations between the two states. Syria's decision to side with Britain during World War I against the Ottomans is still regarded as a stab in the back. The French mandatory power also ceded the Syrian province of Iskendarum to Turkey on the eve of World War II.⁸⁶ Turkey accuses Syria of having supported the PKK and its anti-Turkish campaign with an eye to winning leverage in the water talks.

Cooperation is possible when it is perceived as being cost free, where issues can be de-linked, or where cooperation in one field may spill over into others.⁸⁷ In order to achieve it, the three riparian states must have the political will to sacrifice part of their national sovereignty. The problem to date has been that proposals have not taken sufficient account of rivals' real needs.

As a case in point, in 1988 Turkey proposed the concept of a "peace pipeline" to channel fresh water from the Ceyhan and Seylan rivers in southern Turkey through Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf. The project had to be dropped, because Syria did not want to facilitate an advantage for Israel.⁸⁸ The Syrian alternative called for an accurate calculation of the flow of the two rivers in question, an approximate estimate of the quantity of water that riparian states should need based upon present and future needs, and a determination of the water quota to which each riparian state was entitled, emphasizing that each state had the right to use its share as it saw fit. The proposal was promising, but it was focused on Syrian interests rather than a project for securing the rights of all riparian states in a fair and equitable manner.

Although the Arab League supports Syria and Iraq against Turkey in the water rights issue, Ankara has refused to bend to political pressure and the admonitions of mediators and agree to change its policy regarding the water dispute.

CONCLUSION

Turkey is generally considered to be a significant player in the Middle East due to its geographical location, relative power, and close contact with the West and with the leading world power, the U.S. As secular state with a pluralist democracy and a liberal economy, it represents a unique model in the Muslim world. Turkey is a significant regional force, and cannot be ignored by its Middle Eastern neighbors.

Modern Turkey's seventy-year history has not been sufficient to erase the memories of being "betrayed" by the Arabs as the Ottoman experience neared its end. And the view from the other side is no different—the feeling of mistrust between Turks and Arabs is mutual. Few efforts have been made to improve either bilateral or multilateral cooperation. The constant of Turkish the foreign policy in the region has been to wait and see rather than to become directly involved, based upon an evaluation of the Middle East as a kind of swamp to be avoided at all costs. The Turks have offered timid political support to their neighbors only when there was absolutely no alternative, or when they have felt it to be in their economic interest.

Turkey's approach to the Middle East has nonetheless undergone fundamental changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and there are signs of the emergence of a more active role. First, Turkey's own stability has strengthened its position in regard to the volatile Middle Eastern region. Second, problems with its immediate neighbors have become more complex, and the need for solutions more pressing. Finally, in balancing relations with the Arab world and Israel, Turkey has aggressively pursued its own political and economic interests. Viewed from the outside, Turkey's secular system might appear to be in grave danger, due to the rise of

political Islam. But modern Turkey is not the Shah's Iran, much less contemporary Algeria. Turkish democracy is more mature than is the case with its peers in the Islamic world. Neighboring states' attempts to destabilize the regime have failed, and its future role in the Middle East will depend heavily upon the ability to maintain domestic stability. Another key measure will be Ankara's ability to achieve a reasonable solution to the water dispute with Syria and Iraq. Turkey is a water reservoir in the Middle East, and in the 21st century water may become a more important commodity than oil.

Turkey used its control over water resources to pressure Syria and Iraq to stop their support for the PKK. In the future, Ankara will need to resolve the issue cooperatively, combining a continued commitment to the GAP with respect for the needs of downstream riparian states. This will provide a foundation for joint economic development, and cooperation to resolve the issue of the PKK.

Turkey's important role in the Middle East is also manifest in its attempts to deter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In addition to Israel, Iran, Syria, and Iraq have attempted to acquire such weapons, and the use by Iraq of the medium range Scud missile during the Gulf War, with a range capable of striking Turkey, was a source of grave concern. Closer Turkish-Israeli ties can be explained in part as a consequence of secret cooperation to counter and contain proliferation in the region.

Stability in the Middle East requires a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. No matter how painful it might prove to be, progress in the peace process between Arabs and Israelis will have a positive effect on all concerned countries. Turkey's good relations with both Arab states and Israel, and stature in the Islamic world, give it special capacity to further an acceptable resolution to the conflict. In the event of success, Turkish-Arab relations will blossom, Turkish-Israeli relations will continue to improve, and a better context for regional economic development will be in place. The continued partial closure of the European market to Turkish exports makes regional development a positive option, and Ankara has been instrumental in encouraging the integration of regional electricity networks. Indeed, mutual cooperation is a necessity for all concerned, as the countries of the region all complement each other economically.

Today, the long-term outlook for Turkish-Israeli relations is bright. The fundamental requirements for cooperation are in place. Both states are pro-Western and pro-U.S., committed to democratic and secular values, have similar views concerning terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, and are militarily dependent upon U.S.-made equipment. Perhaps most important, Israel and Turkey share a common sense of apertness in a region dominated by

Arabic and non-democratic regimes. Even an Israel eager to build bridges to the Arab world, as it tries to overcome long-enduring animosity, is likely to be more comfortable in working with the Turks.

For Turks, the benefits of close ties with Israel are many—trade, a close security relationship, improved ties with Washington, influence on the Middle East peace process, and possibly enhanced regional stability. Ankara might also consider making a proposal about water rights that would help to resolve one of the most difficult issues facing Israeli-Syrian peace negotiators. Turkey could even lead or coordinate policies on the future of Iraq. In short, Turkey is seeking a more active role and deeper engagement in Middle East issues, and a special relationship with Israel strengthens its position in this regard. In the future, it must be prepared to be a constructive participant in building the framework to foster peace as a basis for multilateral regional cooperation.

Word count =10,324

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